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No. 5

THE THUNDER CEREMONY OF THE PAWNEE

BY

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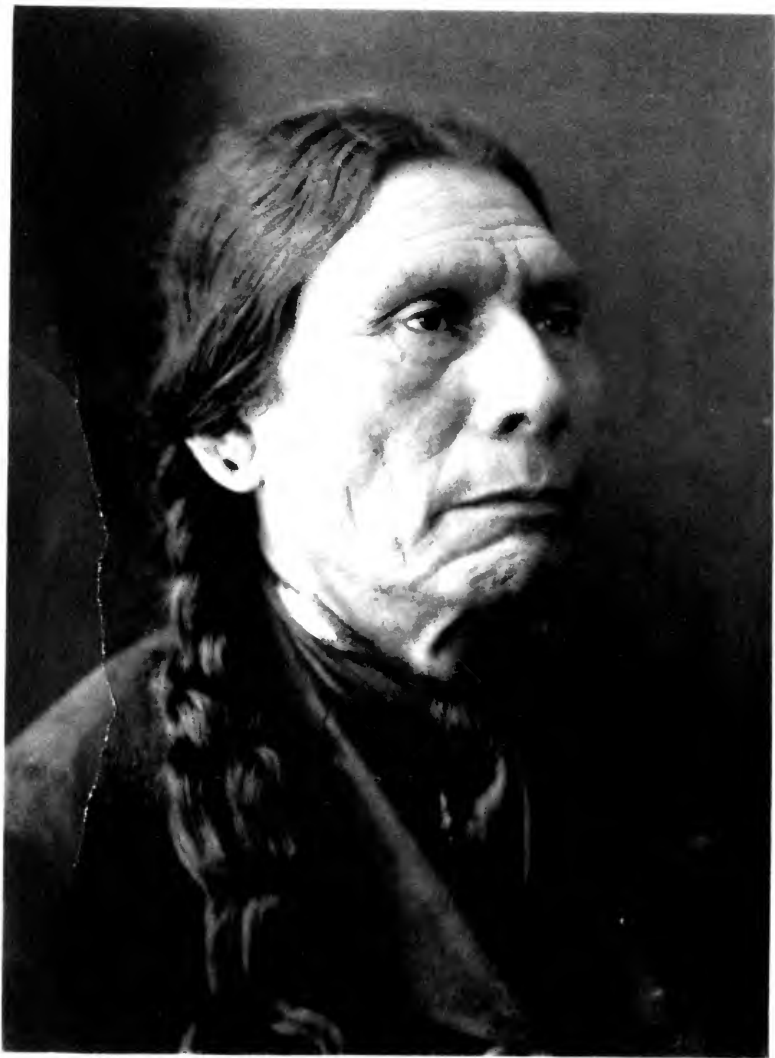


FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

CHICAGO

1922

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FOX, A SKIDI PAWNEE.

THE PLAINS INDIANS

(Hall 5)

PREFACE

The Field Museum's collection illustrating the life of the Indians of the Great Plains is one of the best and most extensive in this country. Much of the material has been obtained directly from the tribes through research of museum officials and others employed by the institution, among whom Mr. S. C. Simms, Dr. G. A. Dorsey, Mr. James Mooney, and Mr. H. R. Voth deserve especial mention. The collections have been further enriched by purchases and particularly by numerous gifts of Mr. Edward E. Ayer, a trustee of the institution, who has always taken a profound interest in this phase of the museum's activities.

The exhibits are especially rich in objects used by the Indians in connection with their religious observances, and several miniature groups have been prepared showing the manner in which the Pawnee, one of the Plains tribes, performed their most important ceremonies. A proper understanding of the significance of such ceremonial objects is impossible without some knowledge of the religious concepts and observances of the tribes represented. The present series of leaflets is designed to give this necessary background by presenting the facts in a simple and popular form. Much of the information contained in them has already been published in various scientific publications; but the descriptions of the Pawnee ceremonies have not previously been published, and it is hoped that they may prove of interest to the scientist, as well as the lay reader.



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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
CHICAGO, 1922

LEAFLET

NUMBER 5

The Thunder Ceremony of the Pawnee

(Hall 5, Case 60)

The Pawnee were a tribe of the Caddoan linguistic stock who, in historic times, occupied the valley of the Platte river in Nebraska. The name Pawnee is probably derived from *pariki* ("a horn"), a term applied to them by the neighboring tribes because of their peculiar method of dressing the hair. They called themselves Chahiksichahiks ("Men of Men"). They seem to have come into Nebraska from some region to the southwest, expelling an earlier population; but this movement was an ancient one, and the first Siouxian tribes to enter the Platte valley found the Pawnee already established.

The region in which the Pawnee lived was high, dry, and rather sandy, with little timber except along the rivers. On the west, toward the mountains, it was rough and broken. In early times buffalo and other game were abundant. Although the Pawnee ranged over a large territory in pursuit of the buffalo, they were not nomads. They spent the greater part of every year in permanent villages and raised large crops of corn, beans, squashes, and pumpkins. Corn played a much more important part than the buffalo in their ceremonies and mythology, and it is evident that they were an agricultural rather than a hunting people.

The tools, weapons, and utensils of the Pawnee differed little from those of the other Plains tribes, but they understood the arts of pottery-making and basket-weaving. During the summer the men usually wore only a loin cloth and moccasins, adding leggings and a robe in winter. The women wore moccasins, leggings, and a skirt made from a buffalo hide tanned on both sides. Upper garments other than the robe do not seem to have been worn in ancient times. The men stiffened their hair with paint and fat, and made it into the form of a curved horn. Both sexes pierced the ears, and often wore large numbers of ear-rings. In their permanent villages the Pawnee lived in earth lodges (see Leaflet "Annual Dance of the Medicine Men"), but when on the hunt they occupied tipis of the sort used by all the Plains tribes.

The Pawnee were divided into four sub-tribes or bands, the Chaui, Pitahauerat, Kitkehahki, and Skidi. The first three of these were closely related, but the Skidi differed somewhat from their associates, and considered themselves more closely related to the Arikara, another Caddoan tribe, who lived some distance to the north. In their settlements along the river, the four bands preserved a regular order, the Skidi being farthest upstream, the Pitahauerat farthest downstream, and the other two bands between. Each band was divided into a number of villages which were social as well as geographical units. All the members of a village believed themselves to be descended from a single ancestor, and marriages were usually made within the group. Descent was reckoned in the female line. Each village possessed a shrine (bundle) containing sacred objects, and priests who had charge of the rituals and ceremonies connected with these objects. It was ruled over by a hereditary chief and a council composed of its leading men. If the chief was a man of character and ability, he exercised undisputed

authority, settled all difficulties, and preserved order. He was expected to give freely, and was usually surrounded by dependents. His orders were enforced by four men, called Nahikuts, who stood next to him in social position. Below these ranked the Kurahus or priests, who performed the ceremonies. Of still lower rank were the Kurau or medicine-men and the Nara-wiraris or warriors, while at the bottom of the scale came the remainder of the village.

The villages composing each band were held together by their religious ceremonies, in which each village had its place and share, and by the council, composed of the chiefs of all the villages. The tribe was similarly united, its council being made up of the councils of the bands. In the meetings of these councils rules of precedence and decorum were rigidly observed. No one could speak who was not entitled to a seat, although a few privileged men were permitted to be present as spectators.

The religion of the Pawnee seems, in certain respects, to have reached a higher development than that of any of the other Plains tribes. In their pantheon Tirawa reigned supreme. To him the lesser gods of heaven and earth, as well as the people themselves, acknowledged authority. Tirawa ruled from his position above the clouds, and both created and governed the universe by means of commands executed by the lesser gods, who were subject to him. He was conceived of as a purely spiritual being, and was not identified with any object or natural phenomenon. Next in rank to Tirawa and his wife, the Vault of Heaven, stood the Evening Star, Tcuperikata. She maintained a garden in the west in which there were fields of ripening corn and many buffalo, and from which sprang all streams of life. Even the Sun renewed his fire nightly at her lodge. Through her four assistants, Wind, Cloud, Lightning, and Thunder, she

transmitted the mandates of Tirawa to the people upon earth. From her union with the god of next rank, the Morning Star, Opirikata, sprang the first being upon earth.

The Morning Star seems to have been a personification of the Male, as the Evening Star was of the female principle. He was conceived of as a warrior who drove the other stars before him from the sky. It was to him that the Skidi band offered a human sacrifice.

Next in rank to the Evening and Morning Stars were the gods of the four world-quarters, who stood in the northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest, and supported the heavens. To them Tirawa gave the task of dividing up the earth into the divisions which we find at present. Next in rank to these were the three gods of the north,—the North Star, who presided over the council of the stars, and who gave the ceremony for the creation of chiefs to men; the North Wind, who sent men the buffalo, and Hikus, who gave the breath of life. Below these in turn were the Sun and Moon, from whose union had sprung the second being on earth who, mating with the offspring of the Morning and Evening Stars, produced the human race.

There were a number of minor heavenly gods,—the second Morning Star, who assisted the Morning Star, the Big-Black-Meteoric-Star, who was the special god of medicine-men, the Star of the South, who stood at the southern end of the Milky Way and received the spirits of the dead, Skiritihuts ("Fool-Wolf"), who felt slighted in the councils of the gods, and, who, in revenge, introduced death into the world, and several others.

The greater part of the heavenly gods were identified with stars. The sacred bundle of each village was believed to have been given to its ancestor by one of these heavenly beings; and when the villages of the



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